

Affirmation: United Methodist for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Concerns

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Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and
Transgendered Concerns
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Judicial Council delivers "Double Whammy"

The United Methodist Judicial Council, which functions like a supreme court for the church, delivered two disappointing decisions following its meeting in late October.

Affirmation spokesperson Jeanne Knepper had argued on behalf of the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference that the ban against same sex covenant services contained in Para. 65C of the UM Discipline violates the UMC Constitution because it discriminates against a class of persons based on their status. The California-Nevada Annual Conference had also requested a declaratory decision on the same issue, and the Judicial Council responded to both requests with one decision.

Based on a narrow reading of the constitutional language, the Council said "nothing has been presented" in the cases before it to demonstrate that the ban unconstitutionally:

- Prohibits anyone from attending worship services in UM churches;
- Bars anyone from participating in church programs of the Church;
- Prevents anyone from becoming a member of The United Methodist Church;
- Restructures any conference or organizational unit of the Church; or
- Exceeds the authority of the General Conference to act.

Therefore, the ban is ruled to be constitutional. Furthermore, on the basis of its analysis, the Council said it was unnecessary to determine whether homosexuality constitutes a constitutionally protected "status." Nevertheless, it urged the General Conference to define "status" when it meets in 2000.

The Council's approach to this case was consistent with two of its usual

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October 1998 National Council Meeting

National Affirmation moved to strengthen its position in the UMC, focused on strategies for the General Conference [GC] 2000 and cleaned up its communications operations all at one meeting. The meeting was held in October 10-12, 1998 in Portland, OR.

Council members received a report on a Coalition Meeting of LGBT UM organizations. They also considered several strategies to follow depending upon various possible rulings of the then upcoming Judicial Council meeting. Several resolutions were decided upon to bring to GC 2000 [see page 12].

Council members took seriously recent criticisms of our less than meticulous communications within our organization and with inquiries coming to our organization. A new volunteer was assigned to monitor our voice mail. A new e-mail address has been established with a new volunteer to monitor it. [See *Affirmation is an all volunteer organization* on page 7].

As always, council members worked very long hours. And as always, they still found many opportunities to laugh and to cry together. We were meeting at the time of Matthew Shepard's murder. We were all stunned and moved to tears.

Building Connections

The Affirmation National Council took three opportunities to build connections. On Friday evening, Council members invited United Methodists to join them for dinner and informal conversation at Old Wives Tales, a Portland restaurant. About 10 people from the community accepted the invitation. Besides the informal conversation, Dick Burdon distributed information about Affirmation and donation forms to those who came. On Sunday, Council members gathered after church to talk with members of University Park UMC about issues and dynamics within The UMC. And on Saturday evening, Council members attended a fund-raising dinner for a program designed to address domestic violence from within the Hispanic community. Besides having a wonderful time and good food, we had a chance to make our commitment to mutual support between diverse communities real in a very practical

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Mission Statement

Affirmation is an activist caucus of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered people organized to speak for ourselves. Together we:

proclaim a gospel of respect, love and justice;

relentlessly pursue policies and processes that support full participation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people in all areas and levels of The United Methodist Church;

overcome the barriers that diminish our common humanity by excluding or judging people because of their race, gender, class or physical abilities;

empower people to undertake works of inclusion and justice where they are.

Affirmation Newsletter

is a quarterly publication. The official views of Affirmation are stated by the Co-Spokespersons. Opinions offered in signed columns, letters and articles are those of the writers and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Affirmation.

To save space in this newsletter:
United Methodist Church = UMC
United Methodist = UM
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered = LGBT

Coeditors
David L. Gunnell and Jerry Nolin

Support of Creech

October 11 was a warm and sunny day in suburban Raleigh-Durham-Chapel hill. The warmth of local supporters' friendship and support shone on Jimmy Creech and his wife Chris Weedy. More than a hundred spent the afternoon enjoying the kind of hospitality for which the South is famous, visiting with one another, and wondering what the United Methodist Church is coming to that it should reject the ministry of one like Jimmy.

And they brought checks -- "love gifts," as they were called by several in attendance, to ease the transition from Jimmy's life in the United Methodist Church to whatever is next. Including designated gifts made to Affirmation for the purpose, the fund had reached \$15,000 by the end of the afternoon.

Attending on behalf of Affirmation, co-spokesperson Morris Floyd told the group how important they are. "As important as Jimmy's witness has been," Morris said, "the solidarity of his friends and family is also critical. Those who make such a witness often depend on this kind of expression for their spiritual and emotional survival. So we in the United Methodist Church also become the beneficiaries of your love, and we thank you too."

[See 25 Coolest Straight People on page 14]

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way, as our dinner tickets covered a third of the profits the event made. We would encourage those planning future council meetings to look for similar opportunities.

Affirmation calls for dissent, adopts GC Platform

UM should dissent from the prohibition of covenant services for lesbians and gay men. The Council called upon UM to dissent "thoughtfully and creatively" from the prohibition on celebrating or hosting covenant services for lesbians and gay men. Affirmation claims that the prohibition is "discriminatory, unjust and unconstitutional."

Affirmation also adopted a Platform Of Legislative Changes And Resolutions For General Conference 2000 [see page 12]. Chief among these is a call to add a new paragraph affirming the rights of all people to enter into covenants to the Social Principles statement. Affirmation insists that it is past time to remove discriminatory passages, such as prohibitions on ordination, covenant services and funding, from the Discipline. "It is time for the Church to decide: does it support discrimination, or not?" said co-spokesperson Jeanne Knepper. "The Church cannot have it both ways, claiming not to discriminate while it labels our lives 'incompatible with Christian teaching,' refuses to celebrate our relationships and does not recognize our calls into ministry."

Umbrella Caucus

Spokesperson Jeanne Knepper represented Affirmation at the Umbrella Caucus meeting, a group of pro LGBT caucus within the UMC. The meeting is to work out a pattern of cooperation at GC 2000. Affirmation is in full participation with this caucus.

Special thanks to all persons in Portland, OR who worked so diligently to make a safe and comfortable space for us to work.

The next meeting of the National Affirmation Council will be in early February 1999 in Houston, TX.

Church law is anti-evangelical

Once again, the UMC is in the news for bringing charges against one of its best and most faithful pastors. Even as he filed charges against the Rev. Gregory R. Dell for officiating at a covenant service for two men within his congregation, Bishop C. Joseph Sprague noted that the Rev. Dell is "a person of integrity" and an "exceptional pastor," with an enviable record of pastoral faithfulness and effectiveness, for whom Bishop Sprague has "high regard." Bishop Sprague made it clear that he has theological and pastoral disagreement with the law he nonetheless has decided to enforce. We've watched over the years as The United Methodist Church has driven many gifted and faithful lesbian and gay pastors out of ministry, but that was not enough for those who preach the "Good News" of judgment and condemnation. Now we've come to the next step, convincing those in positions of trust that it is necessary to bring charges against faithful and gifted pastors who will not turn from their calling to be in ministry with all people, regardless of sexual orientation. No matter how well-intentioned Bishop Sprague is in his attempt to affirm Rev. Dell's integrity and faithfulness, the world at large hears only the simple message: The United Methodist Church seeks to bring one more gay-friendly pastor to trial. This is the stony, rejecting face the Church presents to the unchurched world: this is the Church, driving people away from God.

Hate Group Picket Gay friendly UMC

On November 22, Broadway United Methodist Church in Chicago and the surrounding neighborhood picketed by a national hate group sponsored by the Westboro Baptist Church of Topeka, Kansas. Broadway Church and its pastor, the Rev. Greg Dell, were subjects of the picket because of public attention focused on a covenant ceremony between two gay men which Dell officiated in mid-September. Rev. Dell has been charged with "violating the order and discipline of the United Methodist Church" by Chicago-area Bishop Joseph Sprague. In bringing the charges, Bishop Sprague acknowledged that he, himself, had celebrated such services before becoming a bishop and before the services were outlawed by the UMC. The bishop also publicly stated his opposition to the church's ban on the services while praising Dell's record as a pastor [See *Views* on pages 8-10].

The demonstration was organized by the Rev. Fred Phelps. Phelps and his group have picketed events which are important to the LGBT community across the nation on a regular and ongoing basis. Recent demonstrations were been held at the funeral of hate-crime victim, Matthew Shephard and also at worship services of various churches that are seen as being LGBT-friendly in Minneapolis and elsewhere. Phelps' web site can be found at godhatesfags.com and he has been known to broadcast that he's coming to a certain city so he can get publicity. However, sometimes he and his group don't show up.

"It's unfortunate that individuals and groups carry the kind of hate and fear that these folks do," said Rev. Dell. "But...the strength of community, justice and love is stronger. Broadway's response will be a witness to that strength."

Response to the picket at Broadway UMC included an interfaith vigil which was held the night before the planned demonstration. On the morning of the picket a public witness was held outside of the church where supporters surrounded the entire church building in a "Circle of Care." Over 1,500 supporters attended and according to Rev. Dell, "As we got closer to Sunday it was clear we underestimated the response. We began to plan for 400 and then, just to be sure, actually prepared 800 yellow arm bands. The 800 were distributed in the first half-hour!" The "Circle of Care," wrote Dell, "represented virtually every faith group, denomination, racial group, and age that we have in Northern Illinois."

The 185 member Broadway UMC is a Reconciling Congregation located in the Chicago
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Affirmation National Council

Richard Bates
Austin, TX
[REDACTED]

Sylvia Bauer
Austin, TX
[REDACTED]

Dick Burdon
Portland, OR
[REDACTED]

John R. Calhoun
Oklahoma City, OK
[REDACTED]

W. Allison Flint
Jackson, MS
[REDACTED]

Rick Huskey
Washington, DC
[REDACTED]

Jeanne Knepper
Portland, OR
[REDACTED]

Alice Knotts
Ashland, OR
[REDACTED]

David Meredith
Columbus, OH
[REDACTED]

Mary Padilla
Corona, NY
[REDACTED]

Deborah Robinson
Essex Junction, VT
[REDACTED]

Gary Shephard
Watauga, TX
[REDACTED]

Judith WestLee
Minneapolis, MN
[REDACTED]

Mark Wilson
Washington, DC
[REDACTED]

Andrew Ulman
Allston, MA
[REDACTED]

Affirmation National Council

One man in Mississippi

One woman in New York

One woman in Texas

One woman in
Pennsylvania

Affirmation members to celebrate union in a big way

Fifty or more United Methodist clergy will co-officiate when Jeanne Barnett and Ellie Charlton, longtime partners and Affirmation members, celebrate their relationship with a covenant service to be held January 16.

The Rev. Don Fado, Jeanne's and Ellie's pastor at St. Mark's UMC in Sacramento, California, suggested in a sermon the idea of mass ecclesiastical disobedience following last summer's Judicial Council ruling that the ban on covenant services was church law. Jeanne and Ellie responded because they felt it would be an appropriate way to celebrate their relationship.

The couple have held leadership roles in Affirmation, in their local church and the California Nevada annual conference. In addition Jeanne was a member of the denominational study committee on homosexuality during the 1988-92 quadrennium and was one of the presenters for the committee report at the 1992 General Conference. The General Conference rejected a recommendation from the majority of the study committee that the denomination's stance against homosexuality should be relaxed.

The January ceremony has drawn national attention and interest from UM clergy in other areas who also wanted to be a part of the witness. Clergy participation will be limited to members of the California-Nevada annual conference to help keep the event manageable. However, pastor Fado and Affirmation have been encouraging supporters of covenant services in other areas to consider a similar tactic.

The Rev. John Sheppard, pastor of First UMC in Yuba City, California, has threatened to bring complaints against Fado and colleagues. The charges could lead to church trials next summer, assuming the annual conference finds a way to prosecute dozens of clergy all at the same time. The cases for "disobedience to the order and discipline of the United Methodist Church" would be similar to those brought against Jimmy Creech in the Nebraska Conference and Greg Dell in the Northern Illinois Conference during the past twelve months.

Fado believes the Bible supports celebration of relationships between gay and lesbian couples. "My understanding of Jesus," he told a reporter in northern California, is that he "would reach out to all people."

Ellie told the reporter that said she and Jeanne will follow through with the ceremony no matter what the outcome. "I am a child of God," she said. "I have been told all my life that God loves me. I believe Jesus was inclusive of all people, and as a Christian I find it difficult that we can call ourselves Christian and exclude certain classes of people."

Experience General Conference

Friendships, hard work, joy, and tears all will make General Conference [GC] 2000 a unique experience. Anyone can go meet with Affirmation friends in Cincinnati, May 2-10, 2000. Start saving. Twelve days of hotel housing and meals out can add up!

While GC is political it is also worship, a global experience, educational, and a place for networking. Affirmation usually meets two days before GC, finalizing plans and building mutual support. Conference itself runs long hours, with Affirmation newsletter writing and distribution and get-away events flung in along with meetings and more meetings, early breakfasts and late night caucuses. Visitors watch the delegates at work in small groups, sections, and plenary. Some people sign up to be pages and assistants on the floor at plenary sessions. Affirmation members who are lobbyists listen closely to small groups and talk with delegates in the halls or over meals about decisions being made. Some Affirmation members can't stand the pressure. Their presence and play helps others engage in emotionally grueling work.

At each GC, Affirmation finds that there are both losses and gains. Inch by inch the church moves forward. It's emotionally taxing to invest much and gain little. It would be worse if we weren't there. In addition, our help is needed with many issues of social injustice. We work for the good of the whole. Plan now to be part of Affirmation's presence at General Conference.

By our fruits

The Executive Committee of the Oregon-Idaho Chapter of the Methodist Federation for Social Action adopted this statement on October 14, 1998.

On October 7, 1998, Matthew Shepard, a gay student at the University of Wyoming in Laramie, Wyoming, was brutally pistol-whipped and tied to a fence to die along a lonely Wyoming road.

Shepard was murdered because he was gay. Churches, including The United Methodist Church, stand responsible as accessories to this murder. When official church statements call homosexuality a sin, *incompatible with Christian teaching* [italc added], they create a climate of rejection and hostility that calls forth hatred and brutality.

In October 1990, in Oregon, a District Court jury in Portland ruled that White Aryan Resistance (WAR) and its leadership, Tom and John Metzger, were responsible for inciting three members of the Portland-based East Side White Pride skinheads to brutally murder Mulugeta Seraw, a graduate student from Ethiopia, in a November 1988 attack. This decision was upheld by the US Supreme Court when it refused to hear an appeal by the Metzgers.

The principle of responsibility for the impact of our words has always existed morally. It has been established legally as well. We call upon The United Methodist Church to act quickly and decisively to remove language of condemnation from its Discipline.

New Logo Needed

You may have noticed that the logo on our newsletter has disappeared. The UMC has ruled that no unofficial organization can use the church logo (the cross and flame) - or any variation of this official UM logo.

Therefore, we are in search of a new logo. To encourage ideas, we are conducting a competition. We are looking for a design that expresses our mission of being the voice of the LGBT community within the UMC. It also needs to look good in black and white. If you have a logo design idea, please send it to Affirmation, PO Box 1021, Evanston, IL 60204-1021. The deadline for entries is January 15, 1999. A decision on the winner will be made at our February meeting.

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practices: interpreting the church's governing documents rather literally and avoiding questions that it need not answer to decide the case. Interestingly, the decision appears to leave open the possibility of a different decision if evidence showed that the ban on covenant services has any of the results indicated above. However, it is unclear what evidence would be persuasive. Likewise, the Council's urging for a definition of "status" suggests the need to consider whether this is a route by which the church might be forced to come to itself on the question of inclusiveness.

In another decision this Fall, the Judicial Council seemed uncharacteristically responsive to the politics of the denomination. It ruled that an annual conference or other official entity "...may not identify or label itself as an unofficial body or movement (such as, but not limited to, a 'Confessing Conference,' 'Reconciling Conference,' or 'Transforming Conference')." The Council reversed previous rulings that had allowed the designations by an annual conference and the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns of themselves as "Reconciling" bodies.

The decision overturned a ruling by the bishop in the Northwest Texas Annual Conference that the conference could designate itself a "Confessing Conference" by passing a resolution entitled "A Call to Doctrinal Integrity." "Confessing" bodies are those that call for an essentially literal interpretation of the Bible in determining church polity and doctrine.

This Judicial Council ruling is disturbing because it stifles dissent by official bodies in the denomination--including local churches--against actions of the General Conference. It appears to support an increasingly authoritarian style by denominational leadership by seeking to avoid what the Council called the "divisive" action of official bodies "being in conflict with the Discipline and doctrines of The United Methodist Church." One interpretation of the action is that the Judicial Council has succumbed to the "unity at any price" philosophy that also seems to silence most of our progressive bishops at a time when courageous and prophetic leadership is most needed.

The decision invests the church's current official opinion about homosexuality and a variety of other matters as expressed in the Discipline with the same level of authority as the historic Articles of Religion and Confession of Faith. Thus it abandons John Wesley's own distinction between core teachings of the faith (about which agreement is necessary) and other less weighty concerns that may be subject to differences and changes of opinion as more light is shed on them. Ironically, this new dogmatism is more likely to undermine unity than to foster it.

Report and analysis by Morris Floyd

Another death

Matthew Shepard was murdered because he was gay. His death bore the hallmark of anti-gay violence: extreme viciousness. He was tied, tortured, pistol-whipped and left to die in the bitter cold of rural Wyoming.

We grieve for the loss of this bright and gentle life, for the pain his family and friends feel, for the disorientation and shock this brings to so many. We grieve, but not as those who were surprised by his death.

For Matthew Shepard was not the first, and probably won't be the last. Gay men and lesbians continue to be brutally tortured and killed because someone thinks their sexual orientations make them "Other." We know too many names: Matthew Shepard, Michele Abdill, Hattie Mae Cohen, Roxanne Ellis, Brian Mock . . . the list could go on and on. And it will, until this nation, until our communities, until our churches understand that every anti-gay statement, every anti-gay law, every proper pious pronouncement of *love the sinner, hate the sin*, every intonement of *incompatible with Christian teaching* contributes to a climate that leaves some people believing that to rid the world of a gay or lesbian person is to do everyone a favor. So we challenge those who would insist that *their* language does not promote violence and murder: If you really believe that you are treating gay men and lesbians as persons of sacred worth, try saying it. As often as you rail against us, in every churlish pronouncement, insert the words, *persons of sacred worth*.

Consider the sentences of the United Methodist tradition: *The practice of homosexuality, a practice of persons of sacred worth, is compatible with Christian teaching, or Self-avowed practicing homosexuals, persons of sacred worth, are not to be accepted as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.* Or perhaps, *The council shall be responsible for ensuring that no board, agency, committee, commission, or council shall give United Methodist funds to any gay caucus or group, or otherwise use such funds to promote the practice of persons of sacred worth.* If you find that this dilutes or confuses your message, consider well what that message really is. As long as those who represent the religious traditions organize their institutional life around ways to exclude lesbians and gay men from ministry and prevent the celebration of their committed relationships, for that long will churches be co-creators of a callous and murderous climate where lesbians and gay men continue to be murdered.

Words of violence

Ninety percent of adult gay men and lesbians have been verbally harassed, insulted or threatened with violence because of their sexual orientation. A large number, varying from eight to 61 percent depending on geographic region, have also experienced anti-gay assault. The US Department of Justice has concluded that "homosexual are probably the most frequent victims [of hate crimes]." Moreover hate crimes directed against gay men and lesbians are reported to be particularly violent. For an example, Melissa Mertz, coordinator for the Victims of Violent Assault Assistance Program of Bellvue Hospital in Manhattan observed that "...attacks against gay men were the most heinous and brutal encountered. They frequently involved torture, cutting, mutilation and beating, and showed the absolute intent to rub out the human being because of his [sexual] orientation."

Nor is this violence limited to adults. Nearly half of gay male high school students and one fifth of high school lesbians reported physical and verbal assault. Forty percent of the girls and one third of the boys who were assaulted in high school attempt suicide. According to a study by the US Department of Health and Human Service, thirty percent of all teen suicides are committed by lesbian and gay youth.

Churches, including The United Methodist Church, perpetuate a social climate that permits and covertly encourages such violent. The language of Leviticus has been specifically used in laws that mandated death for homosexuals. Groups such as Wisconsin Christians United advocate outlawing same sex relationships and denying all civil rights to lesbians and gays. In such a climate it is no accident or surprise that 40% of the people who harass gay men or lesbians make specific references to religion, God or the Bible during the assaults. A US Department of Health and Human Services publication states, "Religion presents another risk factor in gay youth suicide because of the depiction of homosexuality as a sin and the reliance of families on the church for understanding homosexuality... Family religious beliefs can be a primary reason for parents forcing youth to leave home if a homosexual orientation is seen as *incompatible with Christian teachings* [emphasis added]. These beliefs can also create unresolvable internal conflicts for gay youth... They may feel wicked and condemned to hell and attempt suicide in despair of ever obtaining redemption."

The United Methodist Church has repudiated verbal and physical violence and the denial of civil rights done in the name of Christ. By itself, however, that is not nearly enough. To be honest, we must either delete the

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language that destroys hope and life or be very clear that as a church we speak and act to encourage harassment, violence and suicide. Murder and mutilation, assault and suicide are being justified *by our words*. As a church, we must take responsibility for the violent social consequences of language we retain.

References:

Gary David Comstock, *Violence Against Lesbian and Gay Men*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.

Gary Remafedi, MD *Death by Denial: Studies of Suicide in Gay and Lesbian Teenagers*. Boston: Allyson Publications, 1994.

From Shalom To You
August 1996

Affirmation is an all volunteer organization, and unfortunately sometimes it shows.

We've been criticized recently for not responding to email. The reason for this is long, complicated, and would probably give you a headache. It involves, as I understand it, someone's computer going up in smoke, and no one else being able to access the email account. We now have a new email address and multiple people have access to it. The new address is <umaffirmation@yahoo.com>

We've had problems responding to messages left on the voice mail. There are new procedures in place and hopefully this won't happen again.

You also may have noticed that membership renewal letters have not been terribly regular. I know as I write this that my own membership is not up to date because the one letter I do remember getting recently about membership renewal wasn't in the format I expected and I wasn't sure if it **was** a membership renewal letter, and I couldn't remember if it was the right time of year. I have the pleasure of being responsible for [didn't duck fast enough at the council meeting] the mailing list and the membership renewal letters. [I think my actual words were "Oh, that's not hard, I've done that for two different local Affirmation chapters." Silly me.] I've mailed letters for the memberships expiring in 1998, and by the time you read this I should have mailed letters for everyone else. If you get a renewal letter and you think you should be getting courtesy copies

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neighborhood known as "Boys Town." The congregation is racially diverse and about one-third of its members identify as lesbian or gay. Greg Dell has been a UM pastor for 28 years and has served the congregation for 3-1/2 years. He has been a leader in the Methodist Federation for Social Action [MFSA]. He was an alternate delegate to the General Conference, and a delegate to the North Central Jurisdictional Conference in 1992 and 1996. He has led MFSA's General Conference lobbying effort and also serves on the General and Jurisdictional Commissions on Religion and Race of the UMC.

"A final word," Dell writes, "must be said about those who would more politely express intolerance in the form of religious doctrine or practice or civil law. We must understand that discriminatory policies provide a seed bed from which the jungle of hate and hate crime grows. Because we do not use the words and slogans of Rev. Phelps or participate directly in the murders of the Matthew Shepards of our world does not relieve us of the responsibility for seeing the connection between polite intolerance and the violent expression of hate and fear. None of us can be relieved simply because Rev. Phelps leaves town or particular hate filled criminals are apprehended. We must take the responsibility for the building of what Dr. King called *the beloved community*."

Rev. Dell now turns his attention to his upcoming trial asking for prayers that justice and God's will may prevail.

Affirmation spokespersons Jeanne Knepper and Morris Floyd pointed out that bringing charges against Rev. Dell have an anti-evangelical impact. Unfortunately, the LGBT community hears only that one more supportive pastor is being prosecuted, they said, leaving unchurched folk ever less likely to participate.

Members and friends of Broadway UMC, celebrating Rev. Dell's pastoral faithfulness to all people, have created "The Justice Fund" to help defray some of the expenses of Rev. Dell's legal fees and other cost associated with his defense against this complaint. Those wishing to help can make gifts payable to "Broadway United Methodist Church," with the words "Justice Fund" noted on the memo line. Gifts may be mailed to Broadway UMC, 3344 N. Broadway, Chicago, IL 60657-3520.

Views

The official views of Affirmation are stated by the Co-Spokespersons. Opinions offered in signed columns, letters and articles are those of the writer and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Affirmation. We welcome those with opposing views to write.

A Response to the Judicial Council's ruling regarding the constitutional of the prohibition of the Celebration of "Homosexual Unions"

It was not surprising that the Judicial Council affirmed the constitutionality of paragraph 65C of The Book of Discipline that prohibits clergy from conducting ceremonies that celebrate "homosexual unions." It is, nonetheless, disappointing and painful.

This ruling adds another layer of authority to the abuse of lesbians and gay men to the teachings of our Church. It legitimizes the inconsistent treatment of lesbians and gay men by singling out "homosexuals" for special discrimination, thereby granting them "status," while at the same time denying them status under Article IV (Inclusiveness of the Church) of the constitution of the United Methodist Church. Status is recognized for discrimination and persecution, but not for inclusion and equal treatment. This is scandalous and corrupt.

Looking to the Judicial Council to free us from our error is vain. The Judicial Council has proven to be susceptible and amenable to the political pressures that protect the status quo. I believe the members of the Judicial Council to be good people who have been compromised by the fear of division affecting our Church.

The bishops of our Church counsel us to work "within the process" to make the changes we believe necessary at General Conference in the year 2000. They treat our concern as if it's simply a matter of resolving a difference of opinions on a debatable theological issue through a democratic process.

On the contrary, the mistreatment of gay men and lesbians by the United Methodist Church is not a matter of a difference of opinions. It is a matter of bigotry, injustice, a poverty of compassion and the failure of our witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. To say to lesbians and gay men that they must wait for justice until at some future General Conference -- whether it be in the year 2000 or 2004 or 2008 or whenever -- the majority of delegates vote to remove the discriminatory language against them from *The Book of Discipline* is to trivialize the persecution and oppression they experience. It is arrogant and callous.

What is at stake is not how we can live together with a difference of opinions regarding sexual orientation, but rather how will we be faithful to the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ? How will we embody the vision of God's sovereign presence in our midst? How will we be free from the bigotry that infects our Church so that all may sit

together at Christ's banquet table and receive the gifts of God's grace?

These are questions that have nothing to do with the polite game of Church politics, but everything to do with the work of the Holy Spirit for justice and compassion. As baptized Christians, we are called to be servants, not to a Church authority that has been compromised by injustice and bigotry, but to the authority of the life-giving gospel of Jesus Christ and presence of the Holy Spirit.

Laws have power and credibility only when we obey them. We obey laws when we grant them authority over our actions. Paragraph 65C is a "law" that should not be granted such authority because it is unjust. It is unjust because it treats lesbian and gay persons differently from non-gay persons, denying them the opportunity to affirm relationships of commitment in the context of their faith. It also should not be obeyed because, by requiring United Methodist clergy to mistreat gay men and lesbians, it compromises the role of pastor.

Consequently, let us celebrate the faithful ministry of Greg Dell and support him and the community of Broadway United Methodist Church in Chicago as they move together toward a church trial.

And, let us stand with Don Fado, Jeanne Barnett, Ellie Charlton, the community of St. Marks United Methodist Church in Sacramento and the more than eighty clergy who plan to co-officiate Jeanne and Ellie's Holy Union in January 1999.

These are not just acts of defiance or acts of ecclesial disobedience. They are profound witnesses of justice and faithfulness, of standing with gay and lesbian persons and for the integrity of the pastoral office. They are actions that will help redeem the United Methodist Church, help bring it back to integrity.

Let us multiply these acts of faithfulness. To those of us who are clergy, I urge you to follow Greg's example by blessing the covenants of gay and lesbian persons without hesitation.

Also, let us encourage couples of lesbians and gay men to follow Jeanne and Ellie's example by publicly announcing their ceremonies of commitment and inviting

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all willing clergy to co-officiate. Let such ceremonies and other creative strategies happen in every jurisdiction of the country. Let them become rule and not the exception. Then the cost of enforcing the prohibition in terms of time, energy and money will far exceed whatever benefit some may perceive or want it to have. The more the prohibition is defied, the less the prohibition will be enforced.

These are prophetic avenues for change in our Church. We cannot wait for any future General Conference to begin to act with justice and compassion. Nor should we wait. To do so reduces our witness for the gospel to nothing more than the vagaries of convention, fashion and trend. We must act now with courage and hope, knowing that we are in the midst of God's history, that God is moving among us and ultimately will use our actions for greater justice and peace.

Surely, there will be retribution and costly consequences for some who choose to follow these courageous examples. But, to those who believe you have a calling to be God's instruments of justice and grace in the Church and in the world, the knowledge that you have been faithful will be sufficient and satisfying enough to transcend the losses. I promise you that!

Jimmy Creech

Dear Bishop Sprague:

The purpose of my letter is to commend very strongly the exemplary prophetic ministry conducted by the Reverend Gregory Dell. His act is a sacramental observance that speaks profoundly to America's social conscience by championing the inherent worth that we ascribe to each and every individual. He deserves our uncompromised, unyielding support.

For me in a deeply personal way, when my television screen showed the lifeless body of young Matthew Shepard bound to a Wyoming fence, I saw simultaneously the living image of a suffering servant who become a profound instrument for reconciliation within a broken society. The church can neither evade nor escape from any action that creates and perpetuates prejudice, discrimination, and violence against gay men and lesbians. For this reason, I join with others in insisting that anti-gay statements against gay persons be removed immediately from our church positions, policies, and practices.

Most sincerely and respectfully,

Daniel Ross Chandler, Ph.D.

To whom it may concern:

We all get upset and want to react to hurt those who are responsible for this heinous crime. But, in our daily lives: how many of us bothered to vote in the last election, to share information and tell friends, to take responsibility and take a stand against hate, and homophobia and discrimination of whatever kind?

Perhaps I am too sensitive, or being a 48 year old jewish man whose grandmother lost 7 brothers and sisters in the death camps. I am sensitized to this, but I see way too many parallels between what happened in Germany in the 1930s to Jews and what is happening in this country to gays.

We are vilified, rendered sub human, the alien, the other. Xenophobia reigns, as well as complacently sit back and let the hate mongers, the christian "right" -- the pharisees justify hatred in the name of Morality and God.

Hitler rose to power on his chairmanship of a committee dealing with the twin issues of abortion and homosexuality. The Jews consistently said, "They just want to make a statement, it will get better." They refused to believe before it was too late.

Protestant theologian Roger Shinn made the following statement:

"The sources of the peculiar horror of homosexuality in our culture are obscure and complex. The Christian tradition, both on the formal and on the popular levels, has had something to do with the case.. but whatever judgment may be made on homosexuality, church and society owe to human beings a concern for justice and a respect for dignity and privacy. Morality is not a valid pretext for cruelty.

We each need to pause, to reflect on Matthew Shephard, and look at the example his parents have set, and vow no more -- never again. It bothers me when I see so many gay men in my city only concerned with pursuing their next trick, but never

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Views

Never again

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having enough time to get involved politically. To make a difference in those around them, and to benevolently assume things are going to be okay. Things don't happen, you make them happen.

Let each of us remember Matthew Shephard who died as a martyr and vow his death wont be in vain and for each of the other victims of hate crimes -- not only gays, but blacks, and Jews, and lesbians and transgendered people. When any one of us is hurt, discriminated against, and hated, we are all hated....and hurt... and discriminated against.

Resolve yourself, pause, and reflect and decide to do some thing positive. Take a stand. Let others know. If you are closeted, come out and be yourself, and refuse to let the fear inhibit you any longer. For fear is the greatest ally of the enemy. As long as we are quiet and silent, they can deal with us with impunity.

Never again.

The biggest danger here is us becoming complacent, flashing briefly with anger, then settling back into our complacent ways, and the world going on unimpeded.

I am angry. I hurt, as do many of you.

But more importantly, resolve yourself "never again". Be an instrument for change, for confronting of evil in our society for taking a stand. The courts will deal with the killers of this poor boy, and we need to save our pity and prayers for Matthew's family... and pray too for souls so twisted they could do this heinous thing to another human being, and not even see a vulnerable bright innocent boy as human.. Vengeance is mine, I will repay said the Lord of hosts. Instead, let us resolve, no more. What can I do. What am I willing to do in the name of God, in the name of my fellow man.

Sonnie35

6 October 1998

Dear Ms. Gunnell:

I concur with your thoughts and can empathize with the hurt and anger expressed in your September 2, 1998 letter... Prior to being elected to the episcopacy, I was a "straight" proponent of a much more hospitable and affirming position regarding gay and lesbian persons in the life of the United Methodist Church. Unfortunately, the position you and I hold has not prevailed, as yet.

Therefore, as a bishop charged with administering church law, I find myself caught.

I urge you and others, who agree, to let your voices be heard as General Conference 2000 approaches. Only General Conference can alter our denomination's position, while persons like us can and must articulate our beliefs and tell the stories of our gay and lesbian relatives, friends and colleagues.

Hopefully, I shall behave lovingly and with much care in the present context.

Grace and Peace,
Bishop C. Joseph Sprague, Northern Illinois Conference

Following are portions of the attached article from Northern Illinois' *Methodist Reporter*, 12 June 1998 issue titled, "All the Social Principle should be supported," by Bishop Sprague

I have received articulate, searching inquiries from people on different sides of the theological aisle regarding my position on matters related to homosexuality.

I offered the word: "...and all specific issues contained in the Social Principles," which are part of the Bishops' Pastoral Statement. These words mean that, if we Bishops are going to uphold the Social Principles on matters related to homosexuality, we must do the same with everything and listed as UM teachings and preference in the Social Principles, including being anti-capital punishment, pastoral regrading abortion, antinuclear, etc. What is fair on one issue is fair on all issues, if the Social Principles are treated as binding.

...For 20 years I have been in the forefront with those who would alter our church's stance and language regarding homosexuality. My record is clear and unequivocal. I believe we are maintaining a position that is not theologically or pastorally defensible and that history will adjudge to have been ill-informed and hurtful. But, the General Conference and the majority of UM disagrees. Hence, the UM statements and proscriptions.

I would never ask anyone to violate his or her conscience as informed by the holy Spirit, but I do ask that we respect the integrity and wholeness of the body of Christ as we seek the leading of the Risen One for the sake of all who are affected by our present struggle and for the church we love.

Scenario of A Christian Coalition Fund Raising Call

The following verbatim is offered as a suggestion of what one can say when called by "Christian Right." for support. This is only one way the conversation could go.

Phone rings.

Affirmation Member [AM]: Hello...

Christian Coalition Caller [CC]: Hi! This is Joe calling on behalf of the Christian Coalition. We're asking for your financial support just as we have supported you during the past year.

AM: You have supported ME??

CC: Why, yes, we have supported you in the area of abortion, homosexuality, prayer in public schools.....

AM: Excuse me. What is the Christian Coalition position on homosexuality?

CC: Well, you know...

AM: No, I don't know. What is the Christian Coalition position on homosexuality?

CC: Why, we're AGAINST homosexuality, of course!

AM: Really?! Isn't that being against a God-given trait, rather like left-handedness?

CC: Well, I don't know if I like that. I'm left handed!

AM: Really?! And when did you decide TO BE left handed, Joe?

CC: Well, well, I don't know....

AM: God didn't create you to be left handed, you know, Joe.

CC: But being left handed wasn't a choice like being homosexual.

AM: And when did you decide to be heterosexual, Joe?

CC: I made the choice quite a while ago.

AM: Really?! Then you considered being a homosexual, Joe?

CC: Well, well, yes, I did.

AM: Really?!I think you need to know some things here, Joe. How did you get my name and phone number?

CC: It was from our anti-abortion list.

AM: Well, I don't understand that because I have been pro-choice for at least 25 years. Joe, you need to know this: I am an ordained minister; I am an out, politically active lesbian living in a committed, loving relationship. I highly suggest that you get my name and phone number removed from your list!

CC: Oh, I'll definitely do that!

AM: Goodbye, Joe.

CC: Goodbye.

NCCC meeting in Chicago

The National Council of Churches of Christ [NCCC] in the USA met November 11-13 in Chicago. Council member Andy Ulman represented Affirmation at this meeting. Items were discussed at this meeting that dealt with the ongoing operations of the Council. Significant structural changes to the Council were debated, plans were made for the 50th Anniversary next year, and the ongoing political and missions work of the council was presented including petitions to release Central American countries from their foreign debt in light of the hurricane and lifting sanctions against Iraq.

In conjunction with this gathering, the Interfaith Coalition for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered Concerns met and began planning for the witness to be offered at next year's Anniversary. They also hosted a prayer breakfast which was attended by 50 people at which both Bishop Melvin Talbert (San Francisco area) and Dr. Bruce Ribbins (General Secretary of the General Commission on Christian Unity and Inter-religious Concerns) spoke briefly. There was great support for the Interfaith Coalition from the NCCC General Secretary and staff, including encouragement for the witness that was being planned.

Proposed disciplinary changes for General Conference 2000

The National Council of Affirmation adopted a slate of proposed changes to the United Methodist Discipline at its April 1998 meeting. Those changes can be summarized as follows. [For ease of reading, we propose deletion of underlined material, and addition of words printed in **boldface type**. Material currently in the Discipline for which we propose no changes will be printed in *italic*.]

Proposed changes to the Social Principles Statement.

Delete between a man and a woman in the first paragraph of Paragraph 65C, so that the sentence reads, *We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity* between a man and woman.

Delete the last sentence of Paragraph 65C: Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.

Add a new paragraph after 65E: **Covenants - We affirm the right of all human beings to enter into covenants with one another. We believe that covenants are social agreements in the pattern of those first inaugurated for us by God, which we find in Scripture. In general, covenantal relationships are characterized by love, justice, commitment and faithfulness.**

Move the sentence, *We seek for every individual opportunities and freedom to love and be loved, to seek and receive justice and to practice ethical self-determination*, from 65F to the end of the first paragraph of 65G.

Add the words, **including sexual orientation**, to the first sentence of Paragraph 65G, so that the sentence reads, *We recognize that sexuality, including sexual orientation, is God's good gift to all persons*.

Modify the fifth paragraph of Paragraph 65G to read: *Homosexual persons no less than heterosexual persons are individuals of sacred worth. All persons need the ministry and guidance of the church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship that enables reconciling relationships with god, with others and with self. Although we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teachings. In the midst of disagreements about the meaning, nature and origins of sexual orientation, we implore families and churches not to reject or condemn their lesbian and gay members. We affirm that God's grace is available to all. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all people.*

Add the word **comment** to the third sentence of Paragraph 65I: *We define sexual harassment as any unwanted sexual **comment**, advance or demand, either verbal or physical, that is reasonably perceived by the recipient as demeaning, intimidating or coercive.*

Amend the preamble to Paragraph 66: *The rights and privileges a **church or society** bestows upon or withholds from those who comprise it indicate the relative esteem in which that **church or society** holds particular persons and groups of persons. We affirm all persons as equally valuable in the sight*

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Sorry

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of the newsletter, let us know. I may have you set up wrong. Otherwise, get that renewal in. From now on renewal letters will go out once a quarter, probably about the middle of the quarter.

That brings up the subject of our name and address database. This also wasn't being updated with any degree of regularity. This was given to me in hard copy format [6 point type] along with lots of handwritten corrections. ["Your mission, you fool, is to key almost six

hundred addresses from six point type, proof them, and produce address labels. You have three weeks or less to do it. Good luck. This tape will self destruct in five seconds."] Since then I've keyed it in and applied approximately one zillion address corrections sent back by the US Postal Service. If there are any problems with how your name or address appear on your mailing label, please let us know. When I rekeyed the database when in doubt I keyed things as they appeared so I probably brought over some typos, and I may have introduced a few of my own. Also, we don't know when the database was last purged of inactive members. Because of this, anyone with an expiration date of 1995 or earlier will receive one last membership renewal letter. After that I'll purge these addresses. If you can't remember the last time you sent us a check and you want to make sure you stay in the database, whip out that checkbook. [And yes, I AM working on the state abbreviations in lower case. Three different times I thought I'd tracked them all down.]

As of right this very moment I think we have everything running fairly smoothly. If you know of something that isn't working right, or if you have any concerns, contact a national council member.

Complaints accepted.
Kudos welcomed.

Gary Shephard

Valentine Book

A guide to celebrating services of love and recommitment for couples. The guide has 60 pages with marvelously illustrated, and desk-top published by Affirmation. It is edited by Alice G. Knotts. Available only through Affirmation for \$10.00 [postage paid]. To order send check or money order to Affirmation, PO Box 1021, Evanston, IL 60204.

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of God. We therefor work toward a church and society societies in which h person's value is recognized, maintained, and strengthened. We support the basic right of all persons to equal access to housing, education, employment, medical care, legal redress for grievances, and physical protection.

Add the word **marriage** to the last sentence of the first paragraph of Paragraph 66: *We support the basic rights of all persons to equal access to housing, education, employment, medical care, marriage, legal redress for grievances, and physical protection.*

Modify paragraph 66H by adding the words, **or Gender Identity**, to the title and by substituting the words, **all persons, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity**, for the words, homosexual persons, in the second sentence: *We are committed to supporting those rights and liberties for all persons, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.*

Amend the fourth paragraph of Paragraph 70: *We commit ourselves to the rights of men, women, children, youth, young adults, the aging and those people with disabilities; to improvement of the quality of life, and to the rights and dignity of racial, ethnic, and religious minorities all persons, regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender or religious affiliation.*

Disciplinary changes

Amend Paragraph 117 by adding a last sentence: **No unit of The United Methodist Church may discriminate against lay persons on the basic of race, ethnicity, gender, disability and/or sexual orientation in employment or volunteer positions in the Church.**

Delete Paragraph 304.2, 306.4.f, 315.9.n, 321.4.a(6) and 326.7.a(6).

Delete Paragraph 304.3

Delete the footnote to Paragraph 306.4.f.

Delete Paragraph 806.12.

Amend Paragraph 811.1.a and b.: *General Policies-1. The General Council on Finance and Administration is authorized to withhold approval of a portion or all of the budget of any agency or any Church-related institution receiving general Church funds until such agency or Church-related institution certifies to the council in writing that it has established and complied with a policy of: (a) recruiting, employing, utilizing, recompensing, and promoting professional staff and other personnel without regard to race, color, age, disability, sexual orientation, or sex; (b) fulfilling its duties and responsibilities in a manner that does not involve segregation or discrimination on the basis of race, age, disability, sexual orientation or sex; and . . .*

Amend Paragraph 2624, Chargeable Offenses, by deleting (b) practice declared by The United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teachings; and by addition of **(j) encouraging one's pastoral charge to withhold or redirect annual conference or general church apportioned asking as an act of ecclesiastical witness.**

Resolutions

No discrimination

The United Methodist Church exists in a world where forces of fear, hatred and misunderstanding rip apart the fabric of community. In the face of these destructive forces, The United Methodist Church re-asserts its condemnation of discrimination against people because of their race, color, national origin, gender, status or economic condition.

We commit ourselves to confront such discrimination wherever it occurs. We will continue to work to eradicate discrimination at all levels of The United Methodist Church.

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25 Coolest Straight People

Rev. Jimmy Creech was honored as one of the 25 "hard-working hip hetero" in the 10 November issue of *The Advocate*. It was "based on recent important deeds they've done on our behalf and at their own expense - literally and emotionally." "Few people [gay or straight]," the article stated about Rev. Creech, "are willing to sacrifice their own livelihoods in order to stand up for equal rights for gay men and lesbians."

Kudos to Jimmy Creech!!!

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Incompatible with christian teaching

The following practices are incompatible with Christian teaching:

- Worship of idols
- Making graven images
- Using the name of God in vain
- Not observing the Sabbath
- Dishonoring one's parents
- Murder
- Adultery
- Stealing
- Bearing false witness
- Coveting a neighbor's family or belongings

Respect in controversy

As United Methodists we recognize that we hold strong and diverse opinions which sometimes challenge our commitments to unity. In the midst of controversy, we affirm the necessity of respect for one another. We are all members of one church, doing our best to be faithful people of God, bringing our stories and experiences to God and each other.

We encourage respectful discussion and support continuing education and study. We believe that our discernment is improved when we study broadly, listen intently and value one another. Although we recognize with regret that some may choose to disfellowship themselves, we do not advocate that people be driven from our common body because of their faithfully held beliefs.

Honesty in publications

The United Methodist Church is a denomination that embraces people of diverse opinions within its midst. We affirm that diversity of opinions is a blessing even as we struggle with the challenges that such diversity presents. While we commend honest disagreement, misrepresentations and published falsehoods tear our connectional fabric apart.

We therefore direct the United Methodist Communications [UMCOM] to monitor the problems of misrepresentation within official and unofficial United Methodist publications and to report findings of inaccuracy through their communications network.

Together amidst controversy

No child of God is beyond God's love. Our ministry, by God's grace, is with all persons.

Amid controversy among his disciples about who was the greatest, Jesus asked them to stop bickering in order to attend to their own attitudes and actions (Luke 9:46-48). Jesus said, "When you welcome even a child because of me, you welcome me. And when you welcome me, you welcome the one who sent me." He called the disciples to be humble, loving and forgiving. He challenged them to proceed with God's mission in the world. He expected them to eat with sinners, associate with outcasts, and live with the poor. In the midst of early Methodist controversy, John Wesley reminded his hearers, "If we cannot think alike, may we not love alike." Amid our own controversy over sexual orientation, God calls us to attend to our own attitudes and actions; to be humble, loving, and forgiving. By God's grace, there are many ways to be in ministry, many ways to speak of our faith, many ways to serve and love.

We acknowledge with humility that although we do not have a common mind about same gender love, we celebrate that our community of faith can embrace difference. We reject words or actions that demonize or misrepresent members of our faith community. We resolve to live together as a people of faith in the midst of difference.